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ABSTRACT

The new Youth Act passed by the People's Chamber of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1974 assumes that the interests of young people concur with the interests of their socialist society and state, for it reforms the rights and conditions for the further development of young people and defines their duties and responsibilities in terms of State contributions. Consequently, a 10-year comprehensive polytechnical school is compulsory for all youth, and all citizens in responsible positions have the statutory duty to entrust young people with overall social tasks comparable to their knowledge/capabilities. In view of various sociological analyses indicating that improved material and cultural living conditions and practical experience in the socialist democracy are primary concerns of GDR youth, the State has provided on-going educational opportunities, cultural centers, a voting age of 18, socialist youth participation mechanisms, etc. While there are no fundamental features separating agricultural from other youth workers, sociological studies show agricultural youth attitudes include: a positive appreciation of their work; a direct correlation between their role in agriculture and the industrialization of agriculture; and a genuine desire to use the knowledge gained via their education. GDR agricultural emphasis is on training youth for modern machinery, responsible jobs, and management. (JC)

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GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

On the Social Status and Career Prospects of Youth in Agriculture in the GDR

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Rural Youth: Human Recource or Human Burden

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Dr. Guenter Tittel

On the social status and career prospects of youth in agriculture in the GDR

At present, about 2,898,000 young people live in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)[1]. That is 17 per cent of the GDR's population that are to be regarded as young citizens.[2]

From a statistical viewpoint, the proportion of youth in the total population of the GDR already indicates that these young citizens represent a significant force in our society. Both the place and social status which they hold in society reflect, to a large extent, the relationship between the socialist state and the leading party of the German Democratic Republic, the SED, and youth.

The young generation in the GDR accomplished and still does accomplish great achievements in economic, political and cultural life. It contributes a considerable amount to the development of this socialist state. Regardless of social status, professional position, world outlook or belief, young people, like all other citizens in a socialist society, enjoy material and social security, and have every opportunity to develop their talents and abilities in their professional and personal lives. There are no unemployed in the GDR. The lives of young people are free from fear of losing their livelihood or of simply having no prospects for the future.

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[1] Calculated from: Statistical Year Book of the German Democratic Republic. 1975. Berlin: Staatsverlag der DDR 1975. p. 389

[2] There are rather great differences in the concept of youth and the youth age-group especially in bourgeois literature. In the German Democratic Republic, the view is adopted (and in so doing we proceed from objective social conditions for the development of young people in our society) that the characteristic social process of development of young people takes place mainly between the ages of 14 and 25. Hence all projects for and promotion of the young apply to that age-group. Paragraph 57, 1 of the GDR Youth Act lays down that 'young persons in terms of this Act are all citizens of the German Democratic Republic up to the age of 25 years.' (Youth Act of the GDR of 28 January, 1974. Berlin: Staatsverlag der DDR 1974. p. 61)

Such basic rights as the right to work, to an education, recreation and leisure-time as well as the political rights, eg. have a voice in decision-making on state and economic affairs, are enshrined in the GDR's legislation and have been fully enforced for young people.(1) Satisfying the natural desire of the young generation for peace, a social security , joy and happiness is a major aspect of government policy.

This applies also fully to youth in socialist agriculture. These young people are an important social force for economic and social changes taking place in the countryside. At the same time, they have secure career prospects in the socialist agriculture of the GDR. This indicates that they work under the same living conditions and have the same prospects of promotion as do any young people engaged in any other form of work.

The new Youth Act passed by the People's Chamber, the GDR's supreme representative body, in 1974, reformulates the rights and conditions for the further development of young people as well as their duties and responsibility in line with the level of development attained by the socialist society, and refers to the problems related to building an advanced socialist society. This Youth Act(2) proceeds from the basic assumption that the interests of young people concur with the interests of their socialist society and their state of workers and farmers.

One of the most interesting sociological facts is the high level at which youth identifies itself with its socialist state.

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(1) The basic rights of the young generation were laid down only four months after the founding of the German Democratic Republic in the "Law of 8 February 1950, on the participation of young people in the development of the German Democratic Republic and the advancement of young people at school, in a career, in sport and recreation."

(2) Young people played an active part, together with all the other citizens, in the preparation of the new Youth Act adopted in 1974. The public debate on the law was conducted over several months and more than 5,4 million citizens expressed their opinions on the law in 240,000 public meetings.

What are the reasons for this?

The implementation of the basic economic, political and social rights of young people has provided certain objective and decisive prerequisites for this identification. At the same time, the enforcement of these basic rights was, and still is, closely connected to the creation of the requisite conditions for their realization.

What is at stake, for instance, is not only to provide, the legal basis for the active and creative involvement of young people at their place of work and the use of all opportunities and forms of socialist democracy. The task lies in the fact that young people be given such conditions as allow them to make a responsible contribution, within their capabilities, in the work process towards achieving political and social aims and tasks and to take part in controlling production in their employing firm. For this reason, equal opportunities for an education given to all young people through compulsory ten-year comprehensive polytechnical schooling which forms the core of the GDR's socialist education system, are a vital prerequisite. On the basis of such an education imparted to all young people in town and country alike irrespective of their social background these young people have the chance to choose a career according to their interests and social requirements, and as a result of their education, they are able to take advantage of socialist democracy.

All people in responsible positions in government and social organisations, schools, nationally owned enterprises and production cooperatives, have the statutory duty to entrust young people with overall social tasks which correspond to their knowledge and capabilities, so that they can prove their worth by successfully carrying them out, and which will enable them to meet new complex social demands of the future. In line with our Marxist-Leninist attitude towards youth, the task of an all-round up-bringing, education and advancement of young people through their teachers as well as executive officials and managers, is seen as a fundamental social task, the successful fulfilment of which is directly linked with the future of the country. In their youth policy, the socialist state and the SED, as the leading party in the GDR, are guided by the objective

requirement of including each subsequent generation in the social revolutionary process. This policy is based on the fact that in the construction of socialism and communism there is no contradiction between the different generations, the so-called generation gap. "On the contrary, the enlightened part of the working-class fully understands that the future of its class and thus of humanity depends entirely on the up-bringing of the coming working-class generation."(1)

This Marxist-Leninist view on the young generation is manifested in many ways in theory and practice under contemporary conditions. In the GDR, it finds its practical application in that an increasing amount of responsibility is transferred to youth in fulfilling important economic tasks. More than 1,500,000 young people are working in the GDR's national economy. It is important to develop a variety of ways and means, which are specific of the active encouragement of youth and take account of their different peculiarities and interests, to enable youth to live up to their responsibilities.

For example, it is possible that administrative and economic departments, in cooperation with the Free German Youth (FDJ)(2) hand over to youth projects of material production. In 1974, there were almost 70,000 such youth projects in the GDR, of which the young people themselves were in charge.(3)

Another form of active, responsible involvement in production is ensured by youth work teams, known here as youth brigades. Such brigades comprise mainly, young workers or cooperative farmers, engineers and apprentices. Since 1971, the number of youth brigades has risen by over 6000 to 20,328.(4)

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(1) Karl Marx: Instructions for the delegates of the Provisional Central Council on certain topics. In "Marx/Engels Werke Bd.16" Berlin: Dietz 1973, p. 194

(2) The FDJ is the united and independent youth organization of the GDR. In 1974, it had 1,824,000 members.

(cf. Klaus Franke, Gerhard Krause: "Kommunisten und Jugend in der DDR" (Communists and Youth in the GDR). Berlin: Dietz 1976, p. 15)

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

Special displays called "Young Innovators Exhibitions", which are organized for and by GDR youth, are a real testing ground for their creative drive, their desire for recognition of their achievements and a prime example of their will to break new ground. These exhibitions enable schoolchildren, students, apprentices and young skilled workers to show their efforts in the fields of the physical, natural and social sciences, in research and technology. In 1974 alone, nearly two million schoolchildren, students, apprentices and young skilled workers took part in "Young Innovators Exhibitions" and worked hard to produce about 400,000 exhibits which gained social recognition and represented a high economic profit.(1)

The organized participation of young people in central building projects in the GDR or outside the country has also proved to be useful in encouraging youth to take over responsibility in the production process. Thus, that section of the natural gas pipeline from Orenburg to the western frontier of the USSR, the central building project in the socialist economic integration scheme, for which our republic is responsible was given over to the youth of the GDR as a central youth project.

Results of various sociological analyses show that the following are the most important factors in the attitude of young people towards their socialist state:

First: the fact that they directly experience the manifold effects of successful daily work in their private lives through a considerable improvement in their material and cultural living conditions.

Schooling, vocational training, study courses and further education programmes enable GDR youth to assimilate continously political, professional and specialist knowledge and skills. In 1974, there were 136,417 students at universities and colleges, 65,248 of which women (i.e. 80,6 students at universities per 10,000 of the population). In the same year,

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(1) cf. "Jugend, FDJ, Gesellschaft" (Youth, FDJ, Society) Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben 1975, p. 236

154,299 students were enrolled at technical colleges (engineering colleges) in the GDR.[1] The social composition of students corresponds to the social class structure in the GDR.

The state's efforts towards safeguarding material conditions for a purposeful use of leisure-time, that is social, sporting and cultural activities of young people, are both manifold and comprehensive. For example, between 1972 and 1975, more than 100 youth hostels were modernized and 13 built. During the same period, the government made available more than 110 million marks for the erection of central holiday-camps, and more than 1,000 new sports centres were opened up.[2]

Expectations for opportunities and conditions for a purposeful use of leisure time are as greatly diversified as the differing interests and needs of young people. Therefore, the forms and measures taken by government, social organizations and young people themselves to create these opportunities and conditions for a sensible use of leisure time are also of a very varied nature. There are

-- rooms or clubs in firms, schools, universities, in towns and villages, where young people can enjoy each other's company;

-- different types of interest groups, where young workers, cooperative farmers, students and school-children etc., can further develop their interests;

-- special theatre and concert performances for interested young persons;

-- manifold opportunities for sporting activities in sports' groups run by firms, schools and universities, sport clubs and training centres;

- continuous efforts by the state to promote literature and drama corresponding to the growing interests and needs of youth.

(1) See: Statistical Year Book of the GDR, 1975, pp. 337-339

(2) See: Egon Krenz: "Die junge Generation der DDR" (The young generation in the GDR). In "Probleme des Friedens und des Sozialismus" (Problems of peace and socialism), Berlin 18 (1975) 7, p. 915

second: practical experience of socialist democracy is of importance in the relationship between youth and its socialist state. The practical experience of socialist democracy within their employing firm is especially important for young working people.

Sociological experiments repeatedly show that taking account of their interests when plans are discussed, participation in the socialist emulation campaign, exercising public control in their firm and participation in meetings when the firm's manager gives his report of activities, all correspond to the interests of young people. These interests as producers are thus harmonized with their role as owners of socialist property. It enhances their urge to assimilate greater political and specialist knowledge, and furthers the need for active participation in and shared responsibility for accomplishing new complicated tasks, both directly in their day-to-day work, and also in fulfilling the more far-reaching social tasks facing their firm or region.

At the age of 18, young people in the GDR have the right to vote, and can stand for election to the people's representative bodies and the social bodies of the state, even to the supreme body of power: the People's Chamber.

17.9 % all members of parliament and local government (People's Chamber, county, district, town, borough and community assemblies) and members of commissions and working groups of county assemblies are young people, 6.2 % alone being in the People's Chamber of the GDR.[1] The Free German Youth (FDJ) has its own parliamentary group in the People's Chamber.

The FDJ constitutes an independent organization for young people in the GDR, which consistently represents their interests in firms and representative bodies at all levels. This youth organization follows the political line of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist party, the SED. So the necessary

[1] Calculated from: Statistical Year Book of the German Democratic Republic 1975, pp. 433-441

groundwork has been laid that basic social interests of young people can be put into practice. Close cooperation between government departments and the FDJ make it possible to take increasingly more account of such special characteristics and interests of the young generation as their thirst for knowledge; their desire for education, recognition and social contact, their creative drive and optimistic expectations for the future, etc. Party and government continuously devote attention to the special features of young people brought about by their age. The SED and the socialist state of the GDR take into account Lenin's warning not to overlook the special features of youth.(1)

Taking account of the special in the work with youth has nothing in common with such conceptions that see youth as a group in itself, as an isolated social force, as an independent class. Marxism-Leninism regards youth as an inseparable component of human society, the social structure of which is not based primarily on age groups, but upon its socio-economic foundations and the classes and strata resulting therefrom.

As stressed at the beginning, there are no fundamental special features separating young people working in the GDR's agriculture from any other occupational group.

A typical characteristic of young cooperative farmers and workers engaged in this field of our national economy (they make up 9.6 per cent of the total workforce employed permanently in socialist agriculture) is what they have in common with all the other members of socialist society. Their rights, duties, role and responsibility are exactly the same as those of the other members of the younger generation. At the same time, they have a specific responsibility for fulfilling the tasks of agriculture because of the place they

(1) Cf. V.I. Lenin: "Jugend - Internationale" (Youth - International) In: Works, Vol. 23, p. 164. Berlin: Dietz 1975

hold in the system of social production and because of their vocational training, and so have a special share in the success scored in the development of socialist agriculture. Sociological studies have confirmed repeatedly that young people in agriculture are keenly prepared to cooperate in an active and responsible way in developing and organizing intensive industry like agriculture.

Having been brought up in the spirit of the working class within the framework of the socialist education system and possessing the same basic knowledge as young industrial workers, young skilled farmers and workers in agricultural enterprises represent a major force within the class of cooperative farmers and that part of the working class engaged in agriculture.

Of those under 25 who were permanently working in socialist agriculture in 1974, 4.7 per cent were university or technical college graduates, 1.4 per cent had a supervisor's certificate and 71.3 per cent held a certificate qualifying them as skilled worker. So 77.4 per cent of youth in socialist agriculture had already completed training in 1974. (1)

Work teams and managements of agricultural enterprises carry great responsibility for the proper use of the available educational potential, and for the systematic promotion and the employment of young people according to their qualification in the agricultural production process and in the social life within the region.

Results of sociological studies show the following trends in the attitude of young people to work in agricultural entreprises:

For young people employed in agriculture, interest in agricultural work is a basic flature. This is expressed in the positive approach to work by the vast majority of young people, in the close connection with the farm, in the desire for information and consultation on questions related to their

(1) Calculated from: "Qualifizierungsberichterstattung nach Eigentumsformen in der sozialistischen Landwirtschaft 1974" (Report on educational standards according to different forms of ownership in socialist agriculture, 1974)

Berlin: Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik 1974
Vol. 1, p. 1

farm or enterprise and in the active participation in the shaping of suitable working and living conditions.

Almost without exception, young people see the further development of their personal career as directly connected with the transition to industrialized production in the GDR's agriculture. Questionnaires completed by and interviews with young cooperative farmers and agricultural workers confirmed repeatedly that their thinking and behaviour, their readiness to work continuously in agriculture is basically in line with the knowledge, conviction and own personal experience that work becomes less hard, more creative and involves more responsibility, so that it becomes more attractive and interesting, when agricultural production is further industrialized. At the same time, studies indicate that young people expect much from working and living conditions. They expect such working and living conditions in agricultural enterprises which will bring about the desired creative, responsible and physically easier work. This includes a large amount of responsibility given to youth for the expert operation and maintenance and the effective utilization of machinery, plant and buildings. At the same time, they take for granted such social achievements of socialism as granting a statutory holiday, providing regularly lunch at the firm's canteen, regular work and leisure time etc., in return for their work in agriculture.

The majority of young people genuinely wish to use the knowledge gained from their education. Two aspects of this are uppermost in the minds of young people employed in agriculture. First, they want to be able to master and expertly handle modern machinery and techniques and to organize and control industry like methods of production. Second, they want and are prepared to make active use of all the forms and opportunities of socialist democracy in their agricultural entreprise and moreover in the region.

With the progressive intensification of agricultural production and the better provision of Agricultural Production Cooperatives and cooperative establishments with modern crop production equipment and the construction of livestock

production plants increasingly objective conditions are created in most of the agricultural enterprises to satisfy such expectations.At places, where production has already been industrialized, one person is often responsible for fixed assets worth of up to half a million marks or more.(1)

Experiences gathered especially by work teams, which made most headway in integrating young people into the agricultural enterprise and in employing them according to their qualification, indicate:

The all-round schooling of young people as well as their further training as specialists in operating crop and livestock production equipment enables them to meet the demands made upon them in the preparation and mastering of industrialized production processes in agriculture. Sociological studies show that the active involvement of young cooperative farmers and workers in the preparation and organization of industrialized production process demands first and foremost that the managements of socialist state farms and cooperatives tackle the following tasks:

First it is necessary to create, according to the level of development reached in the transition to industry like production as many opportunities as possible to put qualified and trained young persons to work with modern machinery. In crop production, this means mainly that young people take charge of such mobile machines as combine harvesters for cereals, potatoes and beet, powerful transport vehicles etc.

Second it is imperative to entrust young cooperative farmers and workers with concrete, responsible tasks at key sectors of the socialist intensification programme and the transition to industry like production. These tasks must make great demands on the political, vocational or specialist knowledge of youth and are a valuable testing-ground for the further socialist development of their personality.

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(1) See Gerhard Grüneberg: "Rede auf dem Kongreß junger Genossenschaftsbauern und Arbeiter der Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft der DDR am 7. Juni 1974 in Leipzig-Markkleeberg." (Speech to the Congress of young cooperative farmers and workers in agriculture, forestry and the food industry of the GDR, on 7 June, 1974) Berlin: Verlag Junge Welt 1974, p. 50

An important tried and tested method, which takes account of these requirements, consists in handing over lines or sections of farm machinery needed in crop production or decisive sectors of livestock production to young people as youth projects.

In 1974, there were 9,874 such projects and 2,879 youth teams in the socialist agriculture of the GDR.(1)

Third, one of the chief concerns of managerial activity must be to make active use of and further develop existing political and technical knowledge of young cooperative farmers and workers in enhancing socialist democracy through participation in management and planning and cooperation in commissions and cooperative and brigade councils.

All opportunities given in enterprises and socialist society at large must be used to full advantage in accordance with the various interests, needs and expectations of young people in dependence of their age. This makes it necessary, for example, that young people be included in the preparations leading to the application and utilization of technological advances in crop and livestock production. It includes to enable managements to create such conditions that young people in agriculture can use all the opportunities provided by socialist society to develop their personality to full capacity, just as members of any other occupational group. Everyday practice in the GDR indicates that, in this respect, there are no fundamental differences between young people engaged in agriculture and those of other occupational groups. This becomes evident from the Young Innovators' Exhibitions. In 1974, 35.770 young people employed in agriculture took part.

These cooperative farmers and farm workers produced a total of 3,802 exhibits, which have been socially recognized. In 1974, there were 1,737 research groups and Young Innovators' Clubs in the GDR's socialist agriculture, with a total membership of 14,731.(2)

(1) cf. 'Hinweismaterial im Studienjahr der FDJ 1975/76' (Reference material for the 1975/76 Marxist education classes of the FDJ) Berlin: Verlag Junge Welt 1975, p. 62

(2) cf. Ibid., p. 63

The development of a sense of responsibility in youth for all-social matters is very important. To young cooperative farmers and farm workers that mainly covers their responsibility for the development of the agricultural enterprise in which they work, and for the growth and defence of social property. In addition, this includes both the responsibility for the application and use of equipment and technological innovations as well as the responsibility for participation in management and planning of the farms development.

The results of sociological investigations indicate that the majority of young cooperative farmers and workers consider that active cooperation in planning and further development of socialist democracy is an important sphere for lining up to this responsibility. In addition to their main work and to some extent also relatively independently of the prevailing concrete technological and material-technical requirements of work, young people can see ways of developing their personalities as socialist citizens, owners and producers, by making use of the various forms of socialist democracy which correspond to their interests.

The following are the basic inter-connected motivations which decisively influence the desire and readiness of young people to play an active part in their agricultural enterprises:

-- enterprise loyalty, a need to be kept informed about their own career prospects, and an awareness of the fact that their personal development is closely connected with that of the enterprise;

-- responsibility for the results of their work, an increasing awareness of the social importance and necessity of the work and hence their endeavour to contribute to the fulfilment of plans and an increase in labour productivity;

-- the desire for active involvement in the organization of social life in the enterprise i.e. participation in such democratic bodies as the management committee of the LPG or commissions set up there, and also in socialist emulation, in the innovation and rationalization campaign etc. and not just in matters directly connected with work itself.

In addition to making active use of such forms of and opportunities for socialist democracy, which are equally available to all members of the farm, there are also special forms specifically designed for young people. These include, for example, meetings with the farm's manager where young people regularly have the chance to discuss political and technical questions with the manager; where they are given information and asked their opinions on problems related to work and social life on the farm and in the region.

The organization of leisure time is of considerable concern in the lives of young cooperative farmers and workers. All endeavours by the socialist state, all the legislation covering the responsibility of society towards youth, fully include also that part of the younger generation which is working in agricultural cooperatives, state farms or cooperative establishments between them.

Work habits and the opportunities for organizing one's leisure-time are fundamentally changing, especially among the young, with the transition to industry like production, which is now going on. Shift-work in crop and livestock production, for example, allows for far more regular working hours and leisure time than was previously possible. Thereby, new and higher demands are being made on material conditions and opportunities for a sensible use of leisure time. There is a growing desire in youth to have living conditions in rural areas which are comparable to those in the towns. The high level of education and qualification in young people, the changes in the occupational and career structures all have a strong influence on the development of the cultural and intellectual needs of youth, and determine the nature of their demands for extensive and interesting forms of leisure activities. It is particularly true with the young, who live in small communities of under 2,000 inhabitants, that the problem of an improvement in leisure pursuits plays an important role in the satisfaction with their work. This includes demands for the provision of youth centres, for help in building new flats for young people, or rebuilding or modernizing old ones, for the development of social community centres, well-appointed

restaurants, etc. Agricultural enterprises carry heavy responsibility for the organization of living and working conditions in villages. In cooperation with government departments they use considerable financial and material resources in rural communities to support cultural and sporting activities of the young. At the same time, young people themselves feel an urge to make an active contribution towards beautifying their villages, and the majority of them are prepared (as is shown by sociological studies) to take part in the improvement of their leisure facilities through a great variety of efforts of their own. Nearly two-thirds of the cooperative farmers and workers employed in agricultural cooperatives and state farms, questioned in a sociological investigation regarded the participation in the construction of youth centres as a focal point of their activities. In addition, more than half of them were prepared to help with the construction of new, or the renovation conversion or alteration of old, flats for young people.

Summing up, the following conclusion may be drawn from the social status and responsibility of young cooperative farmers and farm workers in the GDR's socialist agriculture, a social status and responsibility readily apparent from the objective reality and explanations given: young cooperative farmers and farm workers have just as secure an existence and prospects as do all other young people in the GDR.

Socialism provides young people with all the social preconditions necessary to enable them to consciously develop their abilities and talents in the interest of social progress. The principle guiding the party and the socialist state of the GDR: to give youth trust and responsibility, is realized to its full extent, and has proved its worth in the practice of social life.